

## The Olsen's Fiji Farm



Mr. Niko Baleidaveta

The potential of the cocoa industry in Fiji was what led to the Olsen family's investment in what was once a beaming local industry.

They saw the budding industry for its worth, they felt the need to assist farmers in Fiji on cocoa as it was one of the most demanded commodities in the world.

Michael and Jytte Olsen have had close ties with the people of Namau and bought a piece of land from the Mataqali Navukuta of Navicula Village to start their cocoa farm in the nucleus cocoa plants in Namau settlement.

The couple bought 8 acres of cocoa land with approximately 1,500 plants bearing fruits from the maintenance of caretaker, Niko Baleidaveta and his family.

Upon our visit to Namau to this farm, we had the opportunity to have Niko guide us through the organic cocoa farm.

"The owners specifically wanted the farm to be organic and that is why we kept the farm maintained without the use of fertilizer or chemicals," said Niko.

"They bought the land in 2015 and since then we have progressed with the cocoa bearing fruits again and flourishing annually."

"The Olsen's saw the struggles the cocoa farmers in Fiji are facing and the difference in the money chocolate makers are making from where they were from and thought of helping the community build something better," said Niko.

Hence the start of an idea to also assist an elderly couple, with the caretaker also maintaining their cocoa farm.

"An agreement was made for the couple

to rent their nucleus farm, once the cocoa was back, the rent price would increase, the pruning and maintenance is also a part of the agreement," he said.

"This has created job opportunities for us and also in the process aims to revitalize the cocoa industry as we have a lot of unattended farms with opportunities."

They are weighing their options and identifying areas that need improvement and improving further ones that had already been resolved.

The Olsen farm has moved into another level of production, from the normal process of breaking pods to fermentation, they have moved a step further from drying to packaging.

"The market has always been a concern for us and we are grateful for the help in securing a market, which the Olsen's are doing," he said.

The unfavorable market has forced farmers to look for opportunities that come their way and although the demand has to be met, it has provided some satisfaction.

"There is not a steady market that we can depend on for the supply of our cocoa beans and we are sometimes faced with incidences of fungus infecting beans from the long wait," he said.

"In 2016 we harvested a total of 40 kilograms of cocoa beans and was sold at \$5 per kilogram, a good start after the quest to revitalize the farm."

Lessons have been learnt from past experiences of cocoa drying and Niko hopes to maintain the techniques demonstrated to him by experts.

"Before, our parents used dryers to dry the beans and because of its sensitivity, the smell of smoke was often noticed in the chocolates after the process and this led us to use the sun to dry our beans.

"We are now using that drying method, there are different techniques that people use, as long as there is no negative effect," he said.

With the difficulty of securing a market being a problem, the continuous stride for improvement proved successful with a better second harvest being sent to Denmark.

"The Olsen's secured the market and during the second harvest, we harvested 250 kilograms of cocoa beans all of which was shipped to Denmark to Pure Rainforest Chocolate by Koefoed," said Niko.

"It is just the first year we are supplying and we are processing our packed cocoa for the 2nd shipment, we are starting, but we will definitely get there but nonetheless this is a milestone for us and we're grateful to have achieved it.

Niko has begun his expansion having their own processing unit for fermentating to drying in the sun and roasting and cracking before packing for shipment.

All the beans are collected from cocoa pods around the land which also boasts 2-year-old hybrid cocoa trees.

"It is the future plan of the owners to stretch their helping arms and buy beans from neighboring farmers and to also secure more markets for local farmers.

## Growing Cocoa for Cash



Cocoa farmers working in a cocoa farm

### Recommended Varieties:

- Amelonado
- Trinitario
- Keravat

### Seed Rate:

2500 plants/ha

### Planting Time:

Can be planted all year around but best planting time:

Dry Zone: Mid September to December  
Wet Zone: October to December.

### Spacing:

Between Rows: 2m  
Plants within Rows: 2m  
Planting Materials: Select healthy and disease free as planting materials.

### Fertilizer:

Super Phosphate: Apply 10g per plant, basal application at planting.  
NPK: 13:13:21 200kg/ha @ 2 split application, @ 4 months and 8 months.

Apply fertilizer around the plant based on canopy diameter. Soil analysis should be done before fertilizer application.

### Weed Control/ Management:

Ring weeding, spray with Glyphosate between plants @ 150-200ml/15L of Water or Paraquat at 100ml/15L of Water.

### Disease Control/Management

Black Pod: Spray with Kocide at 53g/16L of Water every 2 weeks.

**Canker:** Remove & destroy diseased plants.

**Sanitation:** Remove disease parts away from the Cocoa field, burn & bury. Plant

the recommended Amelonado variety.

Remove black pods regularly & bury or burn outside the plantation.  
Prune shade trees & overgrown Cocoa branches.

### Insect Control/ Management

Green Semi Hopper: Spray Acephate (sold as Sunthene) @ 12g/16L Water

### Harvest Yield/Food Value:

Harvest @ 3 years after planting.

**Yield:** 2.5 tonnes/ha Wet beans.  
Or  
2.0 tonnes/ha Dry

### Food Value:

Source of Thiamin, Niacin & Vitamin B12.



Cocoa beans processed for making chocolate



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